

# NETWORKING GUIDE

OFFICE OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Phone: 404.727.9957

Email: [rsphcareerdev@emory.edu](mailto:rsphcareerdev@emory.edu)

Visit Us at:

<https://www.sph.emory.edu/careers/index.html>



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# What is a Networking?

## Networking

The sharing of information, knowledge and ideas among individuals, groups, or institutions. The purpose of networking is to connect with others based on shared interests in order to learn, gain insights and create on-going mutually beneficial professional relationships. An additional positive benefit is that it is a great way to learn of potential job opportunities from your network.

## NETWORKING: A CENTRAL ASPECT OF YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Networking is crucial to your future career as a public health professional. Attending your classes and pursuing internships is a key aspect of your professional success, but networking is also a critical aspect that is often ignored. In order to develop and progress in your career, you need other professionals who can help you learn and stay connected in your industry. You also want to be known as a professional who is well networked and enjoys sharing knowledge and assisting others in your profession.

If you are serious about finding a great fit for your next career move in a more effective and timely manner, you must network. One key benefit of networking is that your professional network will keep you in mind when job opportunities become available that you might not otherwise have known about, often referred to as the hidden, unadvertised job market. In fact, research shows that 60 - 75% of jobs are found through connections from your professional network.

Current employees of an organization who are in your professional network are among the best sources of referrals. Many organizations report that 40-50% of their openings are filled by candidates referred to by staff members. Moreover, companies view such candidates more favorably and with a greater level of trust than those brought in through other methods and with no internal connections.

Many underestimate the full value of networking or feel a little uncomfortable with the idea of networking. If that is you, this guide will provide you with essential information about networking and strategies for becoming more confident in your networking efforts.

## NETWORKING IMPACT ON THE JOB SEARCH

- The U.S. Department of Labor reports that 63.4% of all workers use networking job finding methods through contacts such as former co-workers and professionals contacts, family & friends.
- Mark S. Granovetter, a Harvard sociologist, reported to Forbes magazine that networking accounts for almost 75% of all successful job searches.
- The Wall Street Journal has reported that 94% of successful job hunters claimed that networking had made all the difference.

## WHEN & WHERE TO NETWORK

Networking can occur virtually anywhere – elevators, online, social events, professional associations and conferences, peers, organizations, friends, and even in grocery lines, etc. Networking is a learned skill that you can become comfortable with and that you want to build into your career as a consistent practice that never ends just because you obtain a job. Do not wait until you need a job to start developing relationships. It takes time to build relationships, and it cannot be done under tight timeline pressures. In addition, others will be more receptive to you if you are genuinely interested in learning from them, rather than simply contacting them in hopes of finding an immediate jobs.

## OVERCOMING YOUR CONCERNS

If you are one of the many people who are introverts and the thought of striking up a conversation with a complete stranger scares you, fear not. You do not have to change your personality to be successful, rather just the way you think about networking.

### Try these tips:

#### Discard incorrect notions

Many of you may feel that networking is like asking for a handout, but remember, you are not asking strangers for a job! In fact, networking is not just about finding jobs. When you network, you are using shared interests to seek out information, learn and develop mutually beneficial relationships with others. Do not assume you are “bothering people” - most people are happy to speak with you about your shared interests, you just have to reach out and ask for a brief conversation.

#### Become a good listener

You do not need to talk the entire time. Asking thoughtful questions and listening is just as important in building a relationship. Take the time to listen to the other person, demonstrating your interest in the insights they share with you. Absorb and reflect upon what you hear. This will help when it comes time to follow-up with the person, as well.

#### Project a confident and professional demeanor

Do some research on the person through sites like LinkedIn, and when you meet them in-person or virtually, dress professionally – you will automatically feel more confident. Also, use good body language, such as making eye contact, to appear interested and connected.

#### Prepare and practice your “elevator speech”

Write a summary of what you want people to know about you that can be delivered in less than 20 seconds. Make it upbeat and succinct: who you are, your educational background and key experiences, and what your interests in terms of public health skills and work. Then practice your elevator speech in front of a mirror and with friends. [See the next section for more information on preparing your own elevator speech.]

Practice your dialogue, prepare things to talk about (other than the weather), have a list of standard questions, and do your research! Learn what you need to know to sound bright and confident.

#### Do not wait to start networking until you “need” something from someone

Start by taking baby steps. Networking should be incorporated into your life, so that you do not feel like you must go on a frenzy when you are searching for a job. At that time, the contacts you have already made, may come in handy. The key is to build relationships before you need them.

# CRAFTING AN ELEVATOR SPEECH

Imagine that you get into an elevator and find that you are riding up to the 8<sup>th</sup> floor with the Director of the CDC. What would you say in that short amount of time to effectively introduce yourself and grab their attention? This is how the phrase “elevator speech” was coined.

Having an elevator speech is a key part of your preparation for networking. You can use your elevator speech to break the ice in any social situation with other public health professionals, be it an elevator ride or conference reception. Plus, the more you use it, the more comfortable you will become. Using the speech will ease your fear of networking by taking away the guesswork of how to begin a conversation.

An elevator speech – no longer than 20 or 30 seconds – should be informative and describe a few key aspects of yourself and your background. You may want to have a couple of different elevator speeches depending on the purpose. For example, to seek a job, to use at a general networking event, or a career fair. If you are seeking a job after graduate school, you should explain what you did in graduate school (e.g., your department, your APE, your thesis, your volunteer activities, your passions and interests) and the kind of work or organizations you would like to work after graduation. For other purposes, you might explain what your organization does and what makes your work or your organization unique (or describe the value in what you do). Lastly, consider adding an open-ended question at the end to engage the listener.

## SAMPLE ELEVATOR SPEECH

Hello, my name is (First Last Name), very nice to meet you. I am currently a first-year student obtaining my MPH in Epidemiology at Emory’s Rollins School of Public Health and prior to Rollins I served in Peace Corps in Africa. I’m interested in research and analysis to pursue a career in which I can continue to contribute to alleviate the burden of infectious diseases, but I am also exploring many options I’m learning about in public health at Rollins and I’m interested in using my skills in a variety of areas.

What type of work are you involved in at your organization?



# INFORMATION INTERVIEWS

## WHAT EXACTLY IS AN INFORMATION INTERVIEW?

A meeting held virtually or in-person requested by you to learn about the real-life experience of someone working in a specific realm, role, or organization that interests you. It's important to know it is NOT a job interview, but rather an opportunity to ask questions, learn, gain insights, and network with others. People love to talk about the work they do, so if you approach it with an attitude of genuine interest to learn from others, you will see that great conversations and knowledge can be shared and others will be excited to learn more about you as well!

## HOW DO I FIND PEOPLE I'M INTERESTED IN SPEAKING WITH?

There are an abundance of ways to find others working in realms that you are interested in. You can start with the Emory Alumni Network (see our website for links to alumni databases.) Also think of people you've met in your job/internship experiences, professors and guest visitors in your classes, your family and friends who have contacts in different areas, and LinkedIn. There are an endless amount of ways to connect with others as long as you are willing to reach out to others and network.

## HOW DO I REQUEST AN INFORMATION INTERVIEW?

Send the person you would like to speak with a short professional message with the following information.

1. State who you are
2. How you obtained the person's name & contact info
3. Express interest in this person and organization
4. Request 15-20 minute discussion.
5. Provide your contact information

## Sample Message - Customize this message each time

Dear Ms. Jones,

My name is Susan Harris and I am currently a student at the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University. I obtained your name through our Emory Alumni network and learned that you are currently the Manger of Research and Evaluation at XYZ. I would be very interested in learning more about the work you are performing and your organization. Currently, I am a project coordinator intern at ..... (Note: you can provide a brief description of your research work, area of interest, background, etc.)

I would sincerely appreciate the opportunity to speak with you briefly by phone or zoom/skype for 15-20 minutes at your convenience to gain your valuable insights. I can be reached at (phone member) OR (email.)

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(First, Last Name)

# NETWORKING LOGISTICS

If you are attending a Networking Event, consider these logistical issues ahead of time.

## RSVP

Registering to an event, rather than just showing up, is the first way you can indicate your professionalism.

## Attire

Dress professionally, because you only get one chance to make a great first impression. When in doubt, dress a bit nicer than you think you need to.

## Name Tags

Wear your nametag on the right side, providing an easy line of sight when shaking hands.

## Handshakes

Traditional wisdom has been to offer your hand in a firm handshake when meeting someone for the first time, but because of the risk of disease transmission, other greetings are being encouraged. An alternative way of extending a greeting to someone in a professional setting is with a genuine smile and head dip or nod.

## Business Cards

It is appropriate to ask for a card from people you connect with, however if they don't have a card, ask if you can have their email address so you can stay in touch. If you do receive a business card, do not immediately shove it away. Treat it with respect by taking a moment to look at it, and even repeat the name silently in your head. It is fine to take a few quick notes about your conversation on the back of the card to refresh your memory later, but wait until after the discussion is over.

## Food

Do not arrive hungry. You should not be overly focused on food as your time for networking is limited. It is ok to strike up a conversation at the buffet table by simply saying hello and introducing yourself. It is also fine to walk up to someone and say hello. Do not just stand or sit and wait for people to come to you, be open and friendly and learn to say hello.

## Alcohol

Do not overindulge on alcoholic beverages. Know your limits. You want to make sure you present yourself in the best light possible.

## Questions to Ask

It is important to have some standard questions in mind when networking. These can be applied to most situations. However, in social situations where you are introducing yourself to multiple persons, be careful not use the same line of questions within earshot of each host. Ask open ended questions that will stimulate a brief conversation. [See sample questions below.]

## Ending the Conversation

Do not stay in one place talking for too long, after eight to ten minutes, excuse yourself with a pleasantry such as, "It was very nice meeting you," and continue to network. Do not be afraid to speak to many different people, you never know what you might learn or shared interests and contacts both of you may have.

## Sample Questions to Ask:

How did you get your start at your current organization?

What kind of experiences and skill sets would you encourage people to have when pursuing a career in your field?

What do you enjoy most about the work you do?

What types of personality traits do you think are beneficial for people to be successful in your field?

What is the most effective way to network and job search in your industry?

What are typical entry-level job types, titles and functions?

Are there any ideas or resources you would recommend in order for me to learn more about this field?

## PREPARATION – KEYS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

Preparation is the key to having an enjoyable and productive conversation and making a positive impression. Remember, your goal is to learn and share. The person you are speaking with may be a person you can develop a long-term professional relationship with in order to continue to share insights, additional networking contacts, and even future job opportunities or referrals

- Be professional in your appearance and in your communications, this shows you are taking the meeting seriously and makes a positive first impression.
- Be on time, state your name, and express a sincere, “thank you for taking the time to meet with me.”
- After introductions, give a brief summary of yourself and let the person know, “I have prepared some questions I would like to ask, if that would be okay?”
- Be respectful of their time and limit your conversation to 15 to 20 minutes. Only extend the timeframe if you think the conversation is going well and the person you are speaking with actually offers to extend the time frame.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK

Have questions prepared prior to your meeting: **Pick at least 4-5 questions**. Below are example questions to help you learn and create insightful conversations:

- What do you enjoy most about the work you do? (Good way to start the conversation on a positive note.)
- Could you describe what a typical day is like for you in terms of activities and skills sets you utilize?
- What would you say are the most important skills, abilities, and traits a person should have to be successful in this field?
- What were some of the major milestones in your career path that got you to this point in your career?
- What do you find to be the most challenging aspect of the work you do (or the field in general?)
- Are there professional organizations, certifications, or trainings that you would recommend?
- What is the best way to find out about job opportunities in this field?
- How important is networking in this field and do you have any suggestions for networking?
- What would you recommend to increase my chances of being a competitive candidate in this field?
- What are the future trends for this field?
- Are there any other ideas or resources that you recommend as I continue to explore and learn more about this field? (This is a great final question to help the person brainstorm helpful things to share)

### CONCLUDING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Always express gratitude for the person’s time and willingness to assist you.

If you really enjoyed the conversation and think you’ve made a good connection, this is a good time to ask for permission to reach out again in the future by saying “this has been so helpful, would be okay to reach back out to you again as I continue to learn more and progress?” The person will say YES, and now you will feel more comfortable reaching back out to continue the connection.

Follow up on any ideas, resources, or strategies you were given by providing updates to your contact. Example: If they recommended an organization to research, email the person to let them know what you learned.

# NETWORKING TIPS

- Stay organized. Set up a system to record the information of those you have met including a brief summary of the conversation, the date, and any follow-up actions to take.
- Within 24-hours after meeting the person, follow-up with an email stating it was great to meet them and a short statement about your conversation and that you look forward to staying in touch. If it was a great connection, you could also request a follow-up conversation so you can continue to share, learn and network with your contact.
- Remain in contact with people whom you have met by contacting them periodically with a quick update on a new internship, course, article you read that might be interesting, or just to check-in and see how they are doing.
- If someone referred you to another person, make sure to message your original contact and give them a summary of your meeting and thank them for referring you.
- Continue to expand your networking contacts, even after you have graduated or moved on to a different area. We never reach a point in our professional or personal lives where we stop networking.
- Develop an “elevator speech” or brief introduction (20-30 seconds) that identifies who you are and a little about your background and current status.
- Ask open-ended questions, such as “How did you enter into your profession?” that will stimulate a brief conversation.
- Maximize your first impression by preparing in advance, being friendly, and genuinely being interested in learning about the other person.
- Networking sessions are not the time to hand out copies of your resume or ask for a job. Rather, you should focus on sharing information, asking questions, gaining insights and connecting with others. In addition, if the interaction goes well, you can potentially develop a long-term professional connection where you continue to share knowledge and learn from one another

## NETWORK FOR LIFE - FINAL THOUGHTS

Think of networking as a way to connect, share and learn from others who are passionate about their work. If you open yourself up to networking, you will realize there are endless opportunities to network in your classes, your work environment, through professional and student organizations, relatives and friends – virtually anywhere! Networking is a learned social skill you can practice, utilize and enjoy throughout your career and it will become an invaluable part of your overall career fulfillment, advancement and success!